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研究ノート

First Language Use in the SLA Classroom

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Abstract

This paper reviews the guidelines that professional SL (second language) education organizations such as ACTFL have set for target language (TL) use in the SL classroom and traces the theoretical background of first language/TL classroom use. It then reminds that there is a need to remain flexible about (TL) language immersion, as opposed to maximization, in homogeneous SL acquisition classrooms such as those in Japan.

概要

本論文は、ACTFL等の第二言語教育に関する組織が設けた、教室における目的言語の使用をめぐるガイドラインを見直し、教室内での第一第二言語使用についての理論的背景をたどる。そして本論は、日本のような同質な学習者集団から成る教室では、目的言語のイマージョンについては柔軟性を保つ必要性があるとの見解を提示する。

> "Research indicates that effective language instruction must provide significant levels of meaningful communication and interactive feedback in the target language in order for students to develop language and cultural proficiency.... ACTFL therefore recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction.... In classrooms that feature maximum target-language use, instructors use a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension and support meaning making." (ACTFL, 2010)

Introduction

To many SL (second language) teachers and others who follow developments in SLA (second language acquisition), the above 2010 ACTFL statement in support of 90%-plus TL (target language) use in the SLA classroom should not be surprising. Founded in 1967, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has vigorously supported SL educators and focused on the growth of the SL education profession in recognition of the need to prepare SL learners to "function as world citizens" (ACTFL, 2016, Dec.). For this purpose, among other professional involvements, ACTFL has engaged in government activities, has developed language Proficiency Guidelines, and has released at least 14 position statements, ranging from its latest online *Statement on the Role of Language Learning in Valuing Diversity and Promoting Unity* (ACTFL, 2016, Nov.) to its earlier online *Use of the Target Language in the Classroom* (ACTFL, 2010).

Serious professionals understand that academic organizations such as ACTFL promote member exchanges of ideas, disseminate relevant

research through conferences, workshops, and journals, and use that research as a basis for improvements in their fields, which ultimately help the communities they serve. Statements such as the ones ACTFL has released are expected and appreciated within the academic community because they serve as guidelines and standards with which to work when implementing policy within the classroom or elsewhere, until there is repudiation or refutation of the empirical evidence or theories that support them (Harris, 2008).

However, though ACTFL's professional efforts should invoke recognition of this organization's leadership, ACTFL's 2010 statement should not invoke surprise among SLA professionals and others seriously interested in the field because it is not thematically new. After all, the discussion on first language (L1)/TL use in the SLA classroom is extremely long (Stern, 1992, p. 279), with controversy dating from the transition from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) focus on literary language to the Direct Method emphasis on communicative needs (Pardede, 2013) and well beyond, as Stanley's (2002) often polarized TESL-L email list posts make clear.

Due to the length of this ongoing controversy, what we see now is a continuum of perspectives on L1/TL classroom use, even within the parameters of the post-GTM SL education paradigm. In this later paradigm, with its communicative focus, those who support L1 classroom use argue that it can be necessary for class organization and grammar and meaning explanation (e.g., Cook, 2001), for content confirmation before initiating a classroom task (e.g., Nation, 2003), and for student stress reduction (e.g., Rhalmi, 2009). On the other hand, apparently with deep

roots in the Direct Method (Cook, 2001), other professionals maintain the need for predominant or total TL use, at times with extreme consequences as with Korea's Teaching English Through English (TETE) policy (Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014). These communicative SL education perspectives on L1 classroom use, thus, can range from measured acceptance based on such learning environment factors as student goals and motivation and classroom homogeneity to outright rejection (Stanley, 2002).

Undoubtedly, rejection of L1 classroom use has gained theoretical framework from such SLA-researched concepts as Krashen's input hypothesis (1977, 1982) that explains that learners need extensive TL input to master the language, Swain's output hypothesis[1] (1985) that argues that language learners need opportunities to produce input-related output in speaking and writing, and risk taking (e.g., Beebe, 1983) that explains that good language learners take risks. There is, therefore, as Lee (2013) reminds us, conflict between L1 classroom use and SLA theory, in that the theory supports intense TL use. However, do we not question ACTFL's 2010 statement that "language educators and their students use the TL as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction," presumably in all contexts? More relevantly for these researchers, is such a cross-the-board, percent-exact recommendation applicable to the needs and student demands of our Japan-based English as a Foreign Language (EFL) stakeholders?

Discussion

It is true that SLA professionals should ignore neither Krashen's

input hypothesis nor the spirit of ACTFL's 2010 statement. As well, in our Japan-based context, it is true that we should heed the growing multi-level promotion of increased classroom TL use from the government and academia (MEXT, 2014) and presumably from industry (Honda makes English official, 2015). As we have seen, for language input purposes, there are good reasons for limiting L1 use in the SL classroom. However, there are also professional reminders (e.g., Weyland, 2015) that, especially in homogeneous L1-speaker classrooms, we need to consider whether language immersion should be the preferred SL teaching method because its prescriptive nature may conflict with the learning styles and purposes of SLA students, though indeed, as MEXT (2011) directs, we need to keep in mind that we should stimulate student motivation for English learning.

In our context, Japanese students who are often reluctant to make errors, or to draw attention to themselves, may struggle with asking questions in a strict immersion classroom--especially when their target language skills are lower. As other researchers explain (e.g., Doyon, 2000; Fukuyama & Hoshiba, 2016), this reluctance may stem from a variety of factors, including shame at making mistakes, an education system regimentation that stifles initiative, learned dependence resulting in an unwillingness to accept responsibility, and even a lack of social skills due to busy schedules that have restrained their development. In such cases some classroom L1 use for students needing clarification from each other or from the teacher may foster student-teacher (as well as student-student) communication. This may not only build classroom rapport but may enable the educator to monitor student comprehension and progress. Allowing or encouraging some student choice about L1 usage

may also lower student apprehension (the affective filter) and increase positive attitudes and motivation and investment in their own learning. In contrast, a teacher who speaks the L1 but makes it a policy never to use it could find classroom relations strained or unnatural. Allowing for some flexibility in L1 use is also not inconsistent with Krashen's input hypothesis, which stresses *comprehensible* input. Using limited L1 to make input comprehensible makes better sense than having students flounder with language they aren't able to grasp but are afraid to ask questions about.

Where classroom time is limited and multi-step directions for a complex task could be cumbersome, it could also be more efficient to simply give directions in the L1 in order to move an activity along. Some flexibility in L1 use may be needed depending on the time available and the nature of the activity, especially with large classes, which as we have explained elsewhere is an issue (Harris & Miyake, 2017). In addition to those kinds of procedural clarifications, it may be more fair, transparent and humane to use the L1 for clarification of important classroom policies, such as, for example, course requirements and the seriousness of consequences of various classroom expectations and assignments.

Additionally, there are some positive reasons for L1 use in the classroom. A bilingual teacher modeling skills in both languages can be a positive role model for students working on their own language acquisition. The non-native Japanese-speaking teacher who is willing to communicate in both languages despite making mistakes may be a positive role model for students who really struggle with fears about making errors. Native Japanese teachers can also share their language

learning experiences and errors. This could help classroom rapport and help lower the student affective filters. A bilingual teacher can also act as a bridge between the two languages, helping make connections with similarities and differences between the languages and cultures.

Conclusions

TL use in SL classrooms is very important and consistent with current understanding of best practices and standards in SL teaching in Japan and abroad, as evidenced by ACTFL standards as well as MEXT policies. However, the actual application of these standards may require some adjustment depending on various factors such as student-teacher rapport, the needs and levels of the learners, the personality or language background of the teacher, the number of students and the nature of the learning activities. SL educators should by all means maximize their use of TL in the SLA classroom. However, they should remain flexible when SL immersion may not be conducive to SL learning.

[1] We are aware that Swain's output hypothesis has been criticized, e.g., Krashen, 1998. Our purpose is to show the accretion of theoretical support around the rejection of L1 in the SLA classroom.

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